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**THE CHIVALROUS REPUBLIC:  
INTRAREPUBLIC CONFLICT  
AND THE CASE STUDY OF MOLDOVA**

Wilbur E. Gray

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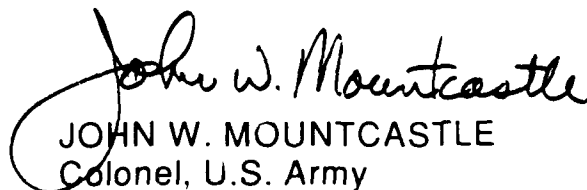
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## FOREWORD

The collapse of the Soviet Union greatly decreased a traditional military threat to the United States, and to world stability in general. This situation, called by many "the end of the Cold War," has produced a natural tendency among policymakers to ignore the former Soviet empire in favor of other concerns, such as domestic issues. However, Russia's development as a peaceful, democratic nation is not yet complete and faces many challenges. And as this study shows, one of the greatest continues to be the resurgence of ethnic nationalism within the borders of the former Soviet Union (FSU).

The author has chosen to focus on one specific ethnic "hot spot," the recent civil war in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova. In doing so he presents a detailed study that illustrates perfectly the larger problem of ethnic strife throughout the FSU. Ethnic violence continues to rear its ugly head in many areas of Moscow's former empire, often with characteristics that match the still unresolved struggle between the Moldovan central government and the rebellious Dniester Republic. As the author points out, such conflicts' ethnic beginnings, their propensity for attracting outside involvement, and their possible undermining of President Boris Yeltsin's fragile reform government make them deserving of another long look by policymakers. Policy recommendations are included for consideration.

This study was undertaken to support the Chief of Staff of the Army's efforts to identify sources of ethnic conflict that may contribute to regional instability. The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this monograph as a contribution to the study of ethnic conflict and to the larger issue of alternative Russian futures.

  
JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

MAJOR WILBUR E. GRAY is a Virginia National Guardsman serving with the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, in the capacity of a Strategic Research Analyst. A graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Major Gray holds bachelor's degrees in both history and political science from Clemson University and a master's in international relations from the University of Southern California. A military intelligence officer in the Active Guard/Reserve program, his last assignment was as Associate Professor of Military Science, University of Virginia. He has served in numerous active duty assignments, to include a tour with the 1st Armored Division in Germany. His National Guard assignments include positions with the 29th Infantry Division (Light).

# **THE CHIVALROUS REPUBLIC: INTRAREPUBLIC CONFLICT AND THE CASE STUDY OF MOLDOVA**

## **Introduction.**

The "chivalrous republic" he called it. This was the term used by 19th century Moldovan historian Bogdan Hasdau to describe a land "Across the Dniester, on the border of Poland with the Tatar Khanate...a tiny republic of fugitives who aimed to destroy the enemies of Christianity...They soon gained fame by their intrepid boldness and came to be called Cossacks..."<sup>1</sup> This independent spirit is not dead in the region, now occupied by Moldova's breakaway Trans-Dniester (or simply "Dniester") Republic, and evidently neither are the cossacks who gave it life. In the Dniester River city of Bendery, placards read:

Volunteers for Cossack units of the Bendery division of the Black Sea Cossack troop are invited to register at the city executive committee from 10 a.m. till 5 p.m. Patriots, join the Cossack Hundred!<sup>2</sup>

Such signs and banners are dripping with ethnic nationalism, and for the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, this is precisely where its troubles began as it soon plunged into a bloody civil war.

Were the conflict in Moldova only an isolated island of instability in a "New World Order," its importance to U.S. national strategy would be minimal. However, the simmering discontent that started this fighting can be found not only in Moldova, but also in every former republic of the Soviet Union, to include mighty Russia itself. This discord centers around the power of ethnic nationalism. Once restrained by the Soviet state, it is now seemingly out of control in all corners of the former Communist empire. If left unrestrained, the political power of ethnic nationalism could easily destabilize each and every one of the newly independent republics. Such events could greatly affect the national, and perhaps vital, interests of the United States. Thus,

to look at Moldova is to also discover what the former Soviet Union might eventually become, and the signs are not necessarily encouraging.

The author of this report, then, offers the conflict in Moldova, not as a picture, but as a window into the possible future of the former Soviet Union. As a first step, he looks at Moldova as a country and how its pure geography, as well as past Soviet geostrategic decisions, set the stage for discontent. He then examines the underlying ethnic causes for the fighting, for that is the first step in finding not only a lasting resolution, but preventing similar occurrences in other parts of the former Eastern Bloc as well. The author then turns to the concerns of regional players over the conflict, because this is necessary for an understanding as to why resolution has been so difficult. Next the actions of the Russian 14th Army in the dispute are considered, for its involvement may well present a picture of how Russia deals with similar incidents in the future. The report finally concludes with an analysis that links the Moldovan situation to the rest of the former Soviet Union, offering suggestions as to how resolution might be attempted in similar circumstances and like incidents prevented.

### **A Problem of Geography.**

Moldova is a tiny landlocked country of scarcely 13,000 square miles. It is literally wedged between the two larger countries of Romania and Ukraine. Economically the country is basically agricultural. What industry there is concerns the production of processed food, wine and tractors. The land of Moldova reflects its economy. Some 54 percent is used for producing crops, 9 percent is pastured, another 8 percent is forested, while some 30 percent is mostly urban and industrial. The vast majority of this industrial area is confined to one portion of the country, a narrow strip of land barely 30 miles wide in eastern Moldova, bordered on the west by the Dniester River and on the east by the new Republic of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

Normally such a geographic concentration of industry, in and of itself, would not present a particular problem to any country, but Moldova, and to some extent the other republics of the former Soviet Union, are anything but normal. Like most of the other



smaller republics of the former Soviet empire. Moldova was a "made up state." It was created in 1929 as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic from chunks of annexed Romanian and Ukrainian territory. In 1940 the Soviet Union added the Romanian province of Bessarabia and the northern section of Bukovina and named the whole mess the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, with its capital at Kishinev (now called Chisenau). In doing so, the Soviet government cut across both linguistic and ethnic boundaries so that now Moldova's population of 4,341,000 contains several ethnic groups. Specifically, 64 percent of the nation considers themselves to be "Moldovan" (translation—ethnic Romanian), 14 percent are ethnic Ukrainian, while 13 percent claim to be ethnic Russian. Another 9 percent of the population are of various other ethnic stock.<sup>4</sup>

Moldova's 13 percent Russian population is currently at the center of a controversy that at one time exploded into a veritable civil war. In September 1991, following Moldova's August 27 declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, the Russian speaking portion of the country likewise declared itself to be independent as well. The new country, the Dniester Republic led by Igor Smirnov as president, was small, but its boundaries almost exactly matched that of the main industrial region of Moldova. To allow the Dniester Republic to go its own way, obviously, was tantamount to courting economic disaster for the rest of the country. Moldovan President and former Communist Party boss Murcea Snegur was more than cognizant of this fact and refused to let the Russian enclave part from the rest of the country. While demonstrations on the part of the Russian population were the normal reaction to Snegur's position, it did not take long for things to escalate. On December 13, 1991, thirteen people were killed and scores others injured when police moved to suppress the separatist Russian state. Both sides swore that the other provoked the deaths and, with that incident, near open war engulfed the nation until a cease-fire accord was reached on July 7, 1992.<sup>5</sup> The cease-fire was worked out among representatives of Dniester Republic, Moldova, a Russian Military Commission and the Russian 14th Army (still stationed in Moldova from Soviet times), and was rightly hailed as the long awaited breakthrough in the dispute. The agreement called for not only an end to the shooting, but also for the disengagement of all armed forces from

the disputed area, the use of observers, and joint security patrols made up of personnel of all sides.<sup>6</sup> Presently, the cease-fire seems to be holding, with UN personnel now on the scene. President Smirnov ordering a turn-in of weapons and President Snegur lifting Moldova's state of emergency on August 19.<sup>7</sup> Two days later, however, seven Russian peacekeepers were wounded by intense shelling in Dubossary.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, a permanent peaceful settlement to the dispute is still not guaranteed.

### **The Seeds of Discord.**

The present situation in Moldova stems from perhaps the biggest failure of Soviet communism, that of the Soviet state to create a "Soviet man." The Soviet Union was never able to combine and synthesize all the various ethnic cultures under its control into a distinctly Soviet culture. Whereas in the United States a person would think of himself as an American first and a member of an ethnic group only "matter-of-factly," the exact opposite might well be true for a citizen of Moldova, who might well consider himself Romanian or Russian. Such a situation was only exacerbated by a long-standing (and quite common knowledge) policy of preferential treatment conferred on ethnic Russians by Moscow.

With such a background, it was only natural that upon its independence, Moldova would stress its hitherto restrained ethnic nationalism. As most Moldovans count themselves as ethnic Romanians, this nationalism took a distinctly Romanian tint. The new country's flag was identical to that of Romania. Its national anthem was the same as Romania's. Even its currency took the same form as Romania's. Not surprisingly, and particularly since part of Moldova is former Romanian territory, there was an increasing amount of talk of all Moldova eventually becoming part of Romania proper, thus uniting all ethnic Romanians into one big happy family.

Certainly such talk was quite serious as far as Romania was concerned. President Ion Iliescu of Romania has kept his language over the issue moderate, noting that while the presence of two Romanian states is an "accident of history," future

unification "largely depended on the will of the Moldovan population, which was the sole arbiter of its fate."<sup>9</sup> Other elements in Romania have been more outspoken, however. The head of Romania's ruling National Salvation Front, former prime minister Petre Roman, took the occasion of the anniversary of Bessarabia's accession to the Kingdom of Romania to declare "national reunification as a constant value in the front's policy."<sup>10</sup> One of Roman's closest associates, Adrian Severin, was even more uncompromising, calling for a "customs, monetary and fiscal union" and drafting a party reunification platform so severe that it was eventually deleted.<sup>11</sup>

Moldovan support for eventual reunification is not lacking. On April 18, 1992, Aleksandr Moshanu, the chairman of Moldova's parliament, publicly declared his support for reunification on national radio.<sup>12</sup> Mircea Druc, the head of Moldova's Christian Democrat Popular Front, has taken a further step by actually running, as an ethnic Romanian, for the presidency of Romania!<sup>13</sup> For his part, Moldovan President Snegur has kept the same moderate tone, at least publicly, as Romania's Iliescu. He talks in terms of the decision being totally a choice of the Moldovan people and frequently uses the term "referendum." Other statements tell a different story, however. Snegur often mentions the fact of a common history and language with Romania, finds it especially noteworthy that Romania was the first nation to recognize the new Moldovan state and rejoices at having "fully restored the rights of the mother tongue on this land."<sup>14</sup>

This last declaration, the establishment of Romanian as the single official language of the country, provided the catalyst that started the present unpleasantness. As noted before, Moldova is not totally ethnic Romanian, but a country with significant Russian and Ukrainian populations as well. Actions such as the language declaration brought home the fact that in the new Moldova, the formerly privileged Russian population could find itself as second class. Such a situation could become even worse if Moldova were to join Romania. Thus, out of this fear of ethnic revenge and persecution was born the Russian Dniester Republic, and in the south of Moldova the much less troublesome Gagauz Republic.<sup>15</sup> President Smirnov of the Dniester Republic justified his country's existence this way:

This was the legitimate consequence of the spreading nationalism on the territory of the former Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In our view, individual rights have priority. However, national rights are given priority over anything else. Considering the national composition of the population living beyond the Dniester River, controversy would have led to the current conflict sooner or later. At the very beginning, the Dniester area parliamentary deputies proposed the creation of a *free economic zone* in this area. They called us secessionists and accused us of trying to dismember Moldova, this "ancient Romanian land." Later we proposed the creation of autonomy here. Why? Because in the euphoria following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Moldovan parliament adopted laws that discriminated against some of their population. On top of it, they also declared the need to create Greater Romania. Naturally, all this alarms our population, because the area beyond the Dniester River has never been a Romanian land.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, Snegur and company have denied these statements, claiming they persecute no one. They point to the Gagauz area and note the existence of a Gagauz university and teacher training center, ethnic Gagauz schools as well as Gagauz language newspapers and radio programs.<sup>17</sup> Further, in a protocol proposed by Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev and accepted by his Romanian and Moldovan counterparts (Andrian Nastase and Nicolae Tui), the right of self-determination for the Dniester area, in the event of Romanian reunification, was guaranteed.<sup>18</sup> Until that time, however, what Moldova will not do is accept Smirnov's ideas about autonomy. This includes the formation of a federal system between three separate states (Moldova, Gagauz and the Dniester Republic) to include duplication of all governmental organs. Snegur remains firmly against this type of dismemberment, seeing both the loss of prime economic turf and a vision of inefficiency as the organization becomes a mini-CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).

For now, and even with an end to the fighting, the positions of the two sides seem irreconcilable. Grigoriy Marakutsa, Chairman of the Dniester Republic's Supreme Soviet, reaffirmed the region's decision to leave Moldova on August 6, 1992, noting that no one from the region would ever occupy posts in a new Moldovan government.<sup>19</sup> For his part, President Snegur has openly declared that the leaders of the Dniester Republic are attempting to turn "the last stronghold of socialism into the

vanguard of the communist revenge."<sup>20</sup> Such are not the words of compromise, a successful cease-fire notwithstanding.

### **Moldova as a Regional Issue.**

In some respects, President Snegur may be closer to the truth than even he realizes. While the dispute with the Dniester Republic does not necessarily involve a resurgent communism, it most certainly involves Russia, as well as Ukraine and Romania. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of the conflict in Moldova is its refusal to simply remain a Moldovan problem. As sad as the fact may be, all three nations have a vested interest in making sure that any settlement of the conflict is resolved in a manner favorable to its own national interests. At the very least, Russia, Ukraine and Romania each desire to insure a settlement that is not contrary to its own particular interests.

Part of the situation with Romania has been discussed above. Moldova, is, for the most part, ethnic Romanian. It is made up in part from territory that used to be part of Romania. And everywhere there are signs that the two nations will soon become one, with the Moldovan parliament even adopting the Romanian *lei* as its own unit of currency. As Alexandru Caraman, Vice-President of the Dniester Republic sadly noted, "One beautiful morning the politicians will say: Look, everything is the same, here and there. What is the point of having borders?"<sup>21</sup> Despite the official statements of both governments, some are already looking to the fateful day that Caraman worries about. Some Romanian political parties are already including Moldovan citizens in their lists of parliamentary candidates.<sup>22</sup> In another ethnically related concern, Romania also shudders over the precedent established if the Dniester Republic does manage to win its independence. After all, Romania has its own groups of ethnic minorities to worry about, particularly the troublesome Hungarians in Transylvania.

It is probable that President Iliescu secretly supports the "gathering in" of all Romanians into a single nation, and that in itself would be justification for involvement in Moldovan affairs. Ethnic considerations are not the only reasons for getting involved, however. Other issues are purely geostrategic in nature

and concern whether Russian imperialism is really dead. From Romania's point of view, should the ethnic Russian Dniester Republic gain its independence, it will position Russian (or Russian dominated) territory squarely on what could be Bucharest's northern flank. This situation clearly worries Romanian leaders, as Russian involvement in the Moldovan situation, in their eyes, demonstrates that Moscow has not broken from its imperial past, trying yet again to secure some foothold to expand the old empire.<sup>23</sup>

From the Romanian point of view, statements by Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi and a resolution adopted April 8, 1992 by the Russian Congress of People's Deputies supporting the independence of the Dniester Republic provide supporting evidence for their charge of Russian expansionism. The Romanians also point to the large numbers of Russian (up to several thousand) cossacks from the Don, Kuban and Urals, who joined with the separatists of Trans-Dniester. These young men, earning up to 5000 rubles a month in an area where the average salary is only 700, represent a deliberate attempt to internationalize the dispute. Romania asks, "Why were these mercenaries not stopped by Moscow?" Bucharest also doubts the neutrality of the Russian 14th Army, still stationed in Moldova. The Romanians note that this army's command did little to prevent groups of Russian civilians from raiding depots and stealing ammunition, machine guns and even armored vehicles. Boris Yeltsin's decree of April 1, which placed the 14th Army directly under Russian control, only heightened fears that its use could be the vanguard of a Russian occupation force.<sup>24</sup> Even those who did not doubt Yeltsin's integrity began to wonder if anyone was really in control of what seemed to be an almost renegade army.

Perceptions such as these have manifested themselves in the form of several actions taken by Bucharest to bolster Murcea Snegur. President Iliescu has repeatedly blasted Moscow for failing to "take a clearer stand and condemn acts violating [Moldova's] sovereignty."<sup>25</sup> At a press conference on April 14, he was even more specific, singling out Russian Vice President Rutskoi and what he called "other conservative proimperial forces."<sup>26</sup> As nasty as these public statements were, their impact was minuscule compared to the many shipments of arms

Bucharest sent to Moldova. On May 21, for example, the Dniester Republic charged that 20 tanks and 30 pontoon bridges were shipped in from Romania and unloaded near the Moldovan settlement of Gidichi.<sup>27</sup> The Dniester Republic also charged that the Romanians were training the Moldovans, and in some cases actually providing Romanian troops to the fighting as well.

Speculation about these charges were without an answer until President Iliescu admitted to them on July 13. Moscow INTERFAX reported.

Iliescu confirmed the information that Romania was supplying weapons, above all artillery and armored vehicles, to Moldova on a commercial basis. "We are not supplying any tanks to Moldova," he said. "Not a single Romanian soldier or officer is taking part in the hostilities in the Dniester region," he stressed.

For a while he continued, "we had a group of our army officers in Bendary acting as military observers. They were members of a special joint commission" consisting of representatives from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. At the same time, Iliescu claimed he possessed information that the Russian 14th Army was supplying large amounts of weapons to the "Dniester separatists and Russian Cossacks."<sup>28</sup>

While Ukraine and its president, Leonid Kravchuk, have not gone so far as to ship arms to Moldova, there is, nevertheless great interest in Kiev over the fate of the tiny country. Like Iliescu, Kravchuk is concerned about the impact an independent Dniester Republic would have on Ukraine's minorities, the Crimeans for example. The Crimeans have already abortively declared their own independence, and before that issue cooled off, actually gained the public support of the Russian parliament. The Russians, while not suggesting changes to existing borders, did nullify Josef Stalin's giving of the Crimea to the Ukraine, declaring that act to have been blatantly illegal. With Kiev embroiled with Moscow over who gets what out of the Black Sea Fleet, ethnic dissent actively supported by Moscow was an unwanted headache. An independent Dniester Republic would establish an unacceptable precedent so far as Kiev is concerned.

Ukraine's interest in the Moldovan problem also stems from the fact that Ukrainians constitute another sizable ethnic minority

in the country. Here, however, the concern is much less than might be thought. While Ukrainians inside Moldova do not generally support the country rejoining Romania, most do support Snegur and Moldova, and hardly any have a desire to "come home" to Ukraine. The Moldovan government has been quite sensitive to Ukrainian needs with Snegur issuing a special decree on February 22, 1991, safeguarding the cultural development of Ukrainians within Moldova. Ukrainian language instruction was announced for schools, and both television and radio broadcasts in Ukrainian were introduced. Parents could choose Ukrainian language training for their children in school. To assist this process the governments of Kiev and Kishinev agreed to have Moldovan teachers trained in the language in Ukraine. Evidently President Snegur considers such actions only natural, as the Ukrainians share the same history of domination and attempted "Russification" as do the Moldovans. Kiev, likewise, seems reasonably satisfied that all is well with its people across the border.<sup>29</sup>

From Ukraine's perspective, what is not well is the same geostrategic issue that Romania has. Kiev finds the Dniester Republic unacceptable because the tiny state would effectively establish a Russian political and military bastion on Ukraine's southwestern border. Political scientist Bohdan Nahaylo put it this way:

For Ukraine, already at loggerheads with Russia over a broad range of other issues, including the future of the Crimea, where a secessionist pro-Russia movement has been very active, the conflict in Moldova has developed into what is virtually a nightmare come true. As Kiev sees it, a "Russian speaking" enclave on the left bank of the Dniester, which remained staunchly pro-Soviet and pro-Union right up until the collapse of the Soviet empire and which is supported by Russian ultranationalist forces, has proclaimed itself an independent state on territory that before 1940 belonged to Ukraine and on which even today both the Moldovans and the Ukrainians outnumber the Russians. A dangerous new dimension has been added to the conflict by the recent involvement of Russian volunteer "Don Cossacks" on the side of the anti-Chisinau forces and by the support for the embattled "Russians" in the "Dniester Republic" openly expressed by Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, and the leaders of the Fourteenth Army, which is based in the Region.<sup>30</sup>



Vice President Rutskoi's remarks, given to the Congress of People's Deputies on April 6, were especially disturbing. Rutskoi firmly declared, "Until Russia guarantees the protection of its citizens wherever they live...there will be conflicts in the former territory of the Soviet Union, there will be thousands of refugees."<sup>31</sup> Such words came right after Rutskoi's visit to the Dniester Republic (made, he stressed, at the specific request of President Yeltsin) where he similarly declared that "the Dniester Republic exists and must exist."<sup>32</sup> This only confirmed to Kiev that Moldova was the first step of a Russian policy of unilateral involvement in the affairs of all former Soviet republics. Kravchuk responded appropriately.

First, Ukraine began to patch up its strained relations with Romania. The two countries both have long-standing territorial claims to Northern Bukovina and parts of Bessarabia, directly causing a less than cordial atmosphere between Bucharest and Kiev. A trip, in April 1992, to Bucharest by Ukrainian parliament head Ivan Plyushch seemed to mend all the fences, however. Plyushch stressed that while Ukraine did not recognize any territorial claims against it, neither did it have similar claims against any other country, Romania and Moldova included. He also stressed Ukraine's adamant opposition to any outside involvement in the internal affairs in Moldova, suggesting that the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) might be a good alternative as an honest broker. The visit was a success and relations between the two nations have been cozier ever since.

Ukraine did not stop there, however. Next Kiev took strict measures to stop the flow of arms and "volunteer" cossacks across her borders into the Dniester area, a step praised by Moldovan President Snegur. Ukraine also began to take a more active role in mediating the conflict, specifically trying to counter Russian involvement at every turn. When the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and Romania held talks in Kishinev over the problem, it was Ukraine that firmly opposed a proposal by Russia's Andrei Kozyrev to use the 14th Army as a peacekeeping force. Ukraine backed Moldova's contention that the 14th Army was anything but neutral, and, instead offered its own troops for the role, an offer that was politely refused.

Nevertheless, Kiev's stance had the desired effect and probably laid the groundwork for the joint observation force enforcing the current cease-fire.

Of course, Ukraine's involvement, like Romania's, was a direct result of Russian actions towards the area. Russia's stance in the Moldovan conflict might best be described as "delicate," and certainly anything but cohesive. In another twist, Russia's involvement in the conflict seems much less concerned with geostrategic issues than does that of either Ukraine or Romania. This is not to say that the geostrategic aspect is not there, only that there is little mention of it in either official or nonofficial Russian circles. This is not surprising, as to admit to having a geostrategic interest, even if it were true, would be most embarrassing and would do nothing to foster close relations with the new, respectable Russian republic. Thus, rather than a strategic interest, Russia's involvement is entirely an ethnic and domestic political problem.

The ethnic part of the Russian equation is rather easy to define. The individuals who have formed the Dniester Republic are not only Russians, but they are the Russians (and their descendents) previously sent by Soviet Moscow to run Moldova, or at least to insure that the tiny republic towed the mark. Now that these same Russians no longer run anything, they become likely targets for revenge in the form of Moldovan ethnic prejudice. It is only natural for the Dniester Russians to look to Boris Yeltsin for support. This is especially true as Russia has had a long history of being the "protector of the Slavs," especially if those Slavs were Russian. One need only remember that Russia's entry into World War I was due to her obligation to protect Slavic Serbia. Going back a few years further, one finds a cause of the Crimean War to be Russia's perceived responsibility to defend Orthodoxy (principally a Slavic Christian denomination) in the Holy Land.

Yet, at first glance, there seem to be numerous reasons for noninvolvement, and these theoretically should dwarf the ethnic issue. *Izvestiya* journalist Maksim Yusin explained these by noting what would happen if Russia became deeply involved in the dispute. He said, "It is not difficult to imagine the consequences—the undermining of the new, 'civilized' image of our country built up with such difficulty in the eyes of the world

community, an inevitable cooling of relations with the West, the probable collapse of the CIS, and the freezing of foreign credits.<sup>33</sup> The last point is especially salient, as it, as in so many other things, points to economics as a base consideration for Russian diplomacy. The Russian economy is in shambles, and the last thing President Yeltsin needs to do is expend what resources the state has in a domestic dispute in Moldova. If the loss of Western aid is involved, entry into the Moldovan problem looks even less inviting. As the Dniester Region is separated from the Motherland by hostile Ukraine, the problem of how to get the resources to the area looms large, even assuming those resources were available.

Yet, many voices in Russia dramatically spoke out for direct Russian intervention. A closer look, however, reveals these critics to be less interested in the welfare of fellow ethnic Russians than they are in taking a golden opportunity to attack Boris Yeltsin and his program of reform. One of these critics is General Albert Makashov, the former commander of the Volga-Ural Military District and a prominent leader of mercenaries for the Dniester Republic. Speaking in the ultra-nationalist newspaper, *Den*, the good general blasted the Yeltsin government, and CIS chief Marshal Evgeny Shaposhnikov in particular, for ignoring the plight of Russians in Moldova and other former republics of the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> He stated:

Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks and other minorities do not want to be a captive nation under Romanian rule. They do not want to lose their language, their culture or feelings of historical pride. The people have taken up arms and are saying 'no' to occupation.<sup>35</sup>

While these comments are blatantly ethnic in nature, others from the same article perhaps reveal an ulterior motive on Makashov's part. In the same piece, he went on practically to call for a revolution to overthrow the Yeltsin government, demanding that all patriotic movements "unite to rebuff the inhuman regime, the killer of the USSR, the flailer of Russia."<sup>36</sup> Again Makashov took aim at Shaposhnikov (he calls him the 'smiling marshal') and ominously warned:

Shaposhnikov's categorical prohibition against intervening in the conflict and his demands for neutrality by Russian soldiers has (sic) led to a bloody civil war. The army is not intervening, but Russian

officers are being killed, units are being disarmed, the families of soldiers have been taken hostage and garrisons have been raided.

Let Shaposhnikov remember the day many years ago when he took the oath to the motherland. For unfaithfulness to that oath, for treason to the motherland, we will judge you, Marshal Shaposhnikov.<sup>37</sup>

One can find similar statements, though not nearly as extreme, throughout the Russian press. Indeed the speeches of Rutskoi, Yeltsin's own (often very independent minded) vice president, are not dissimilar in tone to some of Makashov's more salient points. What this means to Boris Yeltsin is that the Moldovan conflict has to be considered seriously, not only from an ethnic point of view, but from a domestic political point of view as well. Finding an equitable solution to the conflict between Moldova and the Dniester Republic becomes an issue related to the survival of Yeltsin and the reform process, as the dispute has energized political opposition. Such an agreement would simply remove one more target from the sights of Yeltsin's nationalist and old Communist critics. To sit and do nothing is, if not inviting outright revolt, to establish a situation where actions concerning the conflict could remove themselves from the control of Yeltsin's regime. Should this loss of control establish a precedent, it could be only a matter of time before Yeltsin is either dismissed or becomes little more than a figurehead.

In fact, the evidence now seems that this is exactly what happened, prompting a more vigorous Russian involvement in the Moldovan situation, and thus contributing to the current cease-fire agreement. It was, after all, soon after the fighting broke out that reports began to filter back indicating that Moscow had a literal loose cannon on its hands. In this case the artillery piece was known as Lieutenant General Aleksandr Lebed and the Russian 14th Army.

### **The Peace Makers.**

The 14th (Guards) Combined Arms Army was a second line Soviet military force normally kept at about 40 percent strength. A full complement for the army could only be achieved by the mobilization of reservists. The army has soldiers from 30 different

nationalities and is currently stationed in the Moldova area as follows:<sup>38</sup>

Tiraspol	Army HQ
Kishenev	Category I Division (75% + strength)
Tiraspol	Motorized Rifle Division (50% +)
Beltsy	Motorized Rifle Division (50% +)
Belgorod-Dnetrovsky (Ukraine)	Motorized Rifle Division (25% +)
Urgeny	Artillery Division
Bolgrad	Parachute Division
Dubossary	Engineer Brigade
Bendary	Civic Defense Regiment

Smaller units are also stationed in Floresti and elsewhere.

This force totals some 30,000 combat troops, with Russians occupying most of the positions of responsibility, a legacy from the area's Soviet past.<sup>39</sup> Equipment holdings for the army are speculative at best, but at least one source puts the numbers at 155 tanks, 102 armored personnel carriers and 248 artillery pieces.<sup>40</sup> Lebed, the army's new commander, was appointed in June of 1992, to replace MG Yuri Netkachev, who was kidnapped by Moldovan agents (later released, embarrassed, but unharmed). Boris Yeltsin then promoted Lebed to his present rank of Lieutenant General sometime in September 1992.<sup>41</sup>

To LTG Lebed must be given the credit of assuring the survival of the fledgling Dniester Republic. While continuously claiming neutrality and actions of self-defense, most authorities, to include outside observers, believe "that the insurgency and the 'Dniester Republic' would have been inconceivable without the Fourteenth Army's support."<sup>42</sup> The support given to the Dniester separatists has taken many forms. In some cases, soldiers of the 14th Army have left their units to join with the Dniester insurgents. There is also reason to believe that the 14th Army has been providing important intelligence to the Dniester Republic through the use of its many listening posts on the left bank of the river with the same name.<sup>43</sup> Far more disturbing, however, is the arming of the Dniester Republic's fighters from 14th Army arsenals.

Throughout the entire conflict in Moldova, the Dniester Republic has always managed to stay one step ahead of the Moldovan government in terms of military hardware. When Moldovan police first intervened to restore order in the contested area, they were met by a hail of machinegun fire. When the first Moldovan army units were sent in May 1992, they soon found themselves ducking for cover under a barrage of Alazan and Grad missiles. T-64 tanks soon appeared and chased the Moldovan soldiers off. While Lebed has denied turning weapons over to the Dniester Republic, even CIS Defense Minister Shaposhnikov acknowledged that simple banditry could not be solely to blame for the disappearance of 14th Army equipment. Shaposhnikov said that he "did not rule out that the combat hardware had been seized (by the guardsmen) with the complicity of some officers."<sup>44</sup>

Boris Yeltsin, for his part, was quick to point out that the 14th Army's supposed involvement was not done under Moscow's direction. In a May 27, 1992, interview in *Komsomolskaya pravda*, Yeltsin stated:

Unquestionably, there are supporters of the Dniester region among the Fourteenth Army's officer corps, and they are beginning to switch over, sometimes with equipment, to the side of the Dniester people. That is why Snegur, among others, regards this as a direct intervention. But this is not intervention by Russia, it is the defense of the people living there, (undertaken) on the personal initiative of officers living there.<sup>45</sup>

Most observers do not doubt President Yeltsin's word on the matter, but for most his statement hints at a concern even greater than a Moldovan civil war. If Yeltsin is correct then many believe that the situation with the 14th Army provides ample proof that the Russian government is simply not in control of its own country, and in particular the military that defends it. Even after Yeltsin formally declared the 14th Army to be a *Russian* institution (as opposed to a CIS formation), the 30,000 man force and its outspoken commander still seemed to be able to go its own way. No less than Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev has publicly told Lebed to shut up and stay out of politics, stating:

I have issued additional written instructions to Gen. Lebed, whose essence boils down to the impermissibility of political statements

regardless of their form or the forum at which they are pronounced, be they addressed to the Moldovan leadership or to Moldova as a whole. As an army commander, he must perform only his direct duties: To maintain the army in a state of combat readiness and not to permit provocations, especially as regards the seizure of equipment and arms.<sup>46</sup>

LTG Lebed immediately interpreted his boss' orders in a rather unique manner. In an interview with the Ostankino TV company the maverick general declared the Moldovan national flag (again, identical to the flag of Romania) to be a symbol of fascism, allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions about President Snegur and the Moldovan government.<sup>47</sup> To date, Lebed has yet to be disciplined. It is possible that Lebed has friends in high places. He is known to enjoy good relations with Colonel General (and recently appointed Deputy Defense Minister) Boris Gromov. But whatever the reason, the fact remains that Lebed's vitriolic behavior made the Moldovan crisis a well-known, news worthy event, one that could not be ignored. Moscow, its hand forced, acted accordingly and, with quiet, yet forceful, diplomacy, helped bring about the current cease-fire and negotiations that continue to this day.<sup>48</sup>

But perhaps even more interesting than the fact that Lebed's actions pushed Russia into involvement are the reasons behind the 14th Army commander's behavior. On the surface, Lebed's motivation may simply be a sincere attempt to protect ethnic Russians who may soon be persecuted by a vengeful Moldova. Certainly the 14th Army's officer corps, which fully supports Lebed's actions, believes this to be so and has vehemently protested plans to withdraw the army from the area. In a letter written by the 14th Army's officers to Russian Defense Minister Grachev, they noted that "the people of the Dniester Region still see the 14th Army as the sole guarantor of peace and security in the region and perceive the fact that it is not being withdrawn as support from Russia."<sup>49</sup> The same letter, however, also pointed up another possible factor for the 14th Army's involvement in the Moldovan problem. The officers, while expressing concern about the well-being of their families, also pointedly asked:

...and who will give us a roof over our heads in a new place of service? We ask you to understand us correctly—we military

people do not evade difficulties. But it seems fair to us that people be made entirely clear about what awaits their families, not only today but in future service and life, and this is done for us by our minister.<sup>50</sup>

The officers' concern is quite understandable given the current state of military housing in Russia. With so many troops coming home from the far flung reaches of the former Soviet empire, there simply isn't enough adequate shelter to house them all. The recent decision to stop the Red Army's withdrawal from the Baltics, for example, was based at least partially on this fact. Housing can be built, but this takes time and money, things of which Moscow presently has little. The 14th Army's officers, Lebed included, know this and thus the idea of creating an incident to justify this Russian army's remaining in Moldova does not seem outside the realm of possibility.

Other theories about the actions of Lebed and his 14th Army sound much more sinister, however. Some analysts wonder if Lebed's activity is not simply a last ditch attempt by military conservatives to hold on to the edges of the shrinking Russian empire and the gargantuan military that defended it. Creating a need for Russian troops in such areas could help do exactly that.

Other analysts wonder if Lebed's activities are not simply a low level scheme to discredit the Yeltsin government. By raising the issue and doing something concrete about it on his own (and thus before Yeltsin had a chance to), Lebed in fact has made Yeltsin seem somewhat insensitive to the needs of ethnic Russians living outside of Russia proper. As noted above, this supposedly caused Yeltsin to react diplomatically, if for no other reason than to ward off his conservative critics. It also meant that Yeltsin's government had to spend precious time and resources on an issue that was not economic reform, Russia's most pressing problem at the moment. This is exacerbated by the fact that because the 14th Army has not yet come home to be disbanded, Russia must continue to pay for its upkeep. In a small way this weakens Russia's chance for economic recovery and this, in turn, weakens Boris Yeltsin and his reform-minded administration.

Regardless of his reasoning, however, Alexandr Lebed seems to have made his point and won this first round. Russia did get



involved and this involvement did lead to a cessation of hostilities. Also, Moscow has pledged that it will not withdraw the 14th Army from Moldova until a lasting settlement has been reached over the issue, an event some time down the road yet. Now the question must be asked, "What does all of this mean for the future?"

### **Conclusions and Recommendations.**

The whole tangled mess in Moldova and the method by which a (temporary, at least) resolution was reached remains fascinating, not only as a political event in its own right, but because this occurrence seems so similar to events happening in other parts of the vast former Soviet empire. Such a perception can not help but be disturbing. For if the conflict in Moldova is typical of other areas of strife within the borders of the old USSR, this describes a future in which instability, and reaction to it, become the established norm. Instability inherently produces the perception that one's home, family and nation are somehow insecure from outside pressures, therefore demanding that resources be shifted to redress this gap. These same resources, however, are needed for economic and political reform. For without this successful reform it is probable that many of the newly independent republics could shift back to despotic communism. The bottom line, therefore, is that the new republics must perceive themselves as reasonably secure before they can tackle any economic or political problems themselves. As events in Moldova have shown, this will not necessarily be the case.

There are several reasons why finding this security has been a difficult challenge at best. The first of these is the fact that the crisis has been *an ethnic and nationalist conflict*, one that is in particular anti-Russian in nature. The Moldovans are ethnic Romanians, and probably have a deep desire to reunite with the Romanian motherland. After years of Soviet persecution it was only natural that the Moldovans should wish to profess their ethnic pride and identity. The establishment of Romanian as the official language of their new country was only a manifestation of this ethnic awakening. It was also blatantly anti-Russian. Soviet control over Moldova was at least partially accomplished by creating artificial non-ethnic boundaries and by insuring that

ethnic Russians ran the bureaucracy. By making an intimate knowledge of Romanian mandatory for holding any government position, the Russians were effectively barred from running the country. To many it seemed that Murcia Snegur had concluded that it was "payback" time against his old masters. The handwriting was on the wall that Russians would soon become second (or third !) class citizens. While other ethnic groups could be accommodated within Moldova, even here there is the perception that the ethnic Romanian citizens of the country will enjoy a "special" status.<sup>51</sup>

These same perceptions appear elsewhere within the former Soviet Union with alarming frequency. The Baltic states have continuously left no doubts that they want their former Russian masters out as soon as possible. Latvia, for example, has drafted laws that would deny housing rights to any soldier of the Russian army still in the country.<sup>52</sup> Likewise Latvia has demanded that all ethnic Russian members of its parliament learn the national language of Lettish (sound familiar?).<sup>53</sup> Ukraine, even before the collapse of the USSR occurred, confiscated all property of the Russian Orthodox Church and turned it over to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.<sup>54</sup> Fundamentalist Moslems, as the current civil war in Tajikistan shows, would also prefer to have the Russians gone, and would undoubtedly put force behind those feelings if they ever came to power. Even in Russia itself, feelings of ethnic resentment against the old Russian bosses abound as small ethnic pockets such as Tartarstan and the Chechin Republic declare themselves independent.

In those areas where ethnic Russians feel relatively safe, ethnic prejudice, or the fear of ethnic prejudice, still exists, albeit with different targets. Thus we have fighting inside the Republic of Georgia where the Turkic Moslems of Abkhazia and Ossetia want nothing to do with the Christian Georgians. The Russian speaking Crimeans, whose numbers include a solid core of Communists, greatly identify more with Russia than they do with Ukraine, in whose jurisdiction they now reside. A crisis similar to that in Moldova was only narrowly avoided when the Crimean parliament voted for independence on May 6, 1992.<sup>55</sup> Fortunately, a settlement was reached before any blood was shed.

Yet these same disputes, though theoretically not involving ethnic Russians, point to another characteristic which is typical, not only of the Moldovan conflict, but of others within the old Soviet state. That is *the propensity of the crisis not to remain localized but to draw outside involvement*. In the case of Moldova we have seen that Russia, Ukraine and Romania all have substantial reasons for intervening what should technically be a singularly Moldovan problem. This is true elsewhere as well. From a purely political standpoint, Russia sees involvement in Georgia's row with its Turkic minority as a necessary measure to provide stability to its southern flank where its own Moslem minorities reside. Similar thoughts are behind the defense of the Tajikistan capital of Dushanbe by Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division against Moslem extremists. Here there have been reports that Russian (Moslem) soldiers have stolen tanks for the rebels, giving at least some justification for Moscow's intervention.<sup>56</sup> In the same manner, Russia also supported the abortive attempt to create an independent Crimea, knowing full well that this would give Russia leverage in its dispute with Ukraine over the Black Sea Fleet (homeported in the Crimean port of Sevastopol). From a purely ethnic perspective, Russia is also concerned about the treatment of Russians in former territories such as the Baltics, where events have sparked charges from Moscow of officially sanctioned persecution.<sup>57</sup> While such concern may seem purely emotional, let us not forget that it was Moscow's position as "defender of the Slavs," combined with the status of Orthodox shrines in the Middle East, that led to the Crimean War. Domestic politics also comes into play for Russia, as to ignore such ethnic treatment would play directly into the hands of Boris Yeltsin's critics, most of whom will use any policy error to weaken the president's position.

Most importantly, however, *the Moldovan conflict is symptomatic of Yeltsin's position being too weak to begin with*. Yeltsin has been unable to stop the actions of LTG Alexander Lebed and the 14th Army. His administration was unable to stop the flood of pro-Russian cossacks into the Dniester area. Thus the very military that stands as the protector of his government seems only to respond to his orders when it suits them. Russian forces, according to many reports, have become involved in other ethnic disputes such as the conflict in Georgian Abkhazia, and not in a neutral peacekeeping capacity. Concerning Abkhazia, for

instance, Georgian Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani has flatly accused Moscow (Vice President Rutskoy in particular) of aiding the Abkhazian rebels by bombing Georgian troops with SU-25 and SU-24 warplanes.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Azerbaijan reports imprisoning Russian "mercenaries" (of Russia's 366th Regiment) who were captured aiding Armenia.<sup>59</sup>

Involvement of this nature might have had the *de facto* effect of determining Russian policy, thus taking the decisionmaking out of the hands of Yeltsin's civilian administration. Yeltsin, for his part, seems bound to support such unauthorized activities lest he lose the military's support. While such activities may not be signs of a long-range scheme to destroy Yeltsin and reestablish military dominance, we would do well to recall the resignation of several of Defense Minister Pavel Grachev's closest advisors. They concluded that they simply could not fight the overwhelmingly conservative military establishment that seemed bent on stopping every reform that Grachev and Yeltsin proposed.<sup>60</sup> Considering the results of the recent meeting of the Russian Congress of Peoples' Deputies (who effectively decides whether Yeltsin retains power), such events do not bode well for the president's cause. It all reminds one of an ancient Roman proverb that noted that the Praetorian Guard protected Caesar. But who, someone asked, protects Caesar from the Guard?

For the United States there are very few options in dealing with such situations, and they can all be expressed by one word—*involvement*. This country can not allow ethnic disputes, aggravated by the Russian military or not, to become an issue that seriously undermines the credibility of the present Russian government. Right now the United States has the unique position of being one of the few nations which can effectively prevent future "Moldovas" by offering our good offices to mediate such disputes. We must remember that the internal ethnic problems of the former Soviet state are extremely difficult to solve due to long-standing mistrust. This same mistrust has forced the allocation of resources away from economic and political reform and into the sector of security. The United States, or a European entity (such the Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe, for example), could easily play the role of an impartial broker in such matters. Obviously, Russian sensitivities over what could be perceived as

an unwelcome encroachment into an area formerly in their direct line of influence must be considered and reassured. Nevertheless, the fact is that in Moldova (as elsewhere), no one trusts anyone else. To think that the Dniester Republic would trust a Moldovan or Romanian solution to the problem is ludicrous. Likewise, there is very little chance that Murcia Snegur would happily accept a Russian proposal out of hand. But suggestions from the United States, a power with little real interest in the area, ethnic or otherwise, might actually stand a chance of success.

Surprisingly, the U.S. Army could also find an important role to play in any U.S. involvement, particularly since these ethnic squabbles tend to draw outside intervention, often in the form of countries with diametrically opposing points of view. As these newly independent states organize their own militaries, they present the perfect opportunity for America to help with their structure from the beginning. These militaries need to know about such traditions as the noninvolvement of soldiers in politics or obedience to civilian control, accepted as ethical norms in the armies of democratic states, but unknown in the former USSR. Military forces, under U.S. guidance, could be formed on a reserve, territorial defense basis (nonoffensive defense like, say, Switzerland). This could provide adequate defense for the nation, but would preclude aggressive actions across borders. Such a force is very light on the budget, and this means that resources can be spent elsewhere. Resources spent elsewhere yield stronger economic and political institutions, giving democracy a better chance for survival. Certainly the U.S. Army Reserve and the Army National Guard could be extremely useful in such a project. As U.S. Reserve Components, by definition they can be resident experts on the subject. Indeed, the Guard has already taken the lead with its blossoming relationship with Lithuania. Should concerns about such involvement be raised either with Russia or our own military, friendly nations with similar experiences (Sweden perhaps) might consider the task.

This last point can not be taken lightly, however, especially in regards to the present Russian government. U.S. involvement, whether political or military, in an area traditionally thought of as Russian turf is bound to bring severe objections from Moscow, regardless of who is in control. From a geostrategic perspective

alone such concerns would be understandable. Another consideration must be the possibility that U.S. involvement might actually damage the position of President Yeltsin's unstable reform government. Past events have already shown that Russian conservatives, both political and military, are eagerly looking for any ammunition that might be used to undermine Yeltsin's government. Having Moscow's former big adversary influencing events right on the country's borders is sure to be used as evidence of Yeltsin's "betrayal" of the nation. Thus, any U.S. actions in the area must be accomplished delicately and with due regard to Russian sensitivities. Moscow's cooperation must be genuinely sought.

There is of course one more option. As one writer noted:

The alternative is to let these fragile democracies stumble along without any political-military advice whatsoever. We can only hope that they make the right decisions on their own. If they fail, and bloodshed occurs in ways that our advice could have prevented, we will share some of the blame.<sup>61</sup>

We will also have to pick up the pieces when everything collapses, a much more expensive proposition than offering help now. As one TV commercial on auto repair noted, "You will either pay me now, or pay me later." Paying later may well be an alternative that this country can not afford.

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